

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



Midnite Mine Superfund Site, Wellpinit, Washington

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10

September 2005

EPA Requests Your Comments on Midnite Mine Cleanup Plan

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) invites your comments on the proposed cleanup plan for the Midnite Mine Superfund Site on the Spokane Indian Reservation. This fact sheet summarizes the cleanup alternatives that EPA considered and its preferred alternative. A full discussion of these topics can be found in the Proposed Plan. The final plan for this site may change in response to your comments or new information.

The public comment period runs from October 5 to November 7, 2005. Written comments must be postmarked or emailed by **November 7, 2005** and sent to:

Ellie Hale, Project Manager
U.S. EPA
1200 Sixth Avenue, ECL-115
Seattle, WA 98101-1128
hale.ellie@epa.gov

Come learn about the Proposed Plan

EPA will host **two public meetings** to discuss the Proposed Plan and answer your questions. Both meetings will take place on **October 19, 2005**. The same information will be presented at both meetings, so come to the one that is most convenient for you.

Wednesday, October 19, 2005 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. or 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

Toward the end of the public comment period, EPA will host a meeting where you can provide comments on the Proposed Plan. This meeting will take place:

Wednesday, November 2, 2005 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.

All meetings will be held at the **Spokane Tribal Longhouse**. From Wellpinit, go south on Highway 27 (Wellpinit-Little Falls Road). Turn left on Highway 18 (Sherwood Loop Road). The Longhouse is on the left side of the road.

Get a Copy of the Proposed Plan

You can get a copy of the Proposed Plan, read project documents, and learn more about Midnite Mine by going to:

Spokane Tribal College and Community Library

6232 Old School Road, Wellpinit, WA
509-258-9202

EPA Region 10

Superfund Records Center
1200 Sixth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101-1128
206-553-4494 or toll free: 800-424-4372
Please call for hours or an appointment.

Online: <http://www.epa.gov/r10earth>

Click on *Index A-Z*, then on *M*, and on *Midnite Mine*.

General Information: Renée Dagseth

EPA Community Involvement Coordinator
206-553-1889 or toll free 800-424-4372
dagseth.renee@epa.gov

Technical Information: Ellie Hale

EPA Project Manager
206-553-1215 or toll free: 800-424-4372
hale.ellie@epa.gov

Alternative formats are available. For reasonable accommodation, please call Renée Dagseth. TTY users, please call 800-877-8339.

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Why is a cleanup necessary?

Over 20 years of mining for uranium ore at Midnite Mine left open and waste-filled pits, as well as piles of waste rock and ore. The rock and ore contain radioactive metal, which can cause cancer. The bare rocks also react with air and water. The reaction causes radioactive and toxic metals from the rocks to enter water in the pits and nearby streams. People, plants, and animals that use the site or rely on the water may be at risk.

Water is currently treated to remove contamination, but a long term solution is necessary.

What is EPA proposing to do?

EPA studied a number of ways to solve the environmental problems at the site. After studying the alternatives, EPA is recommending one (the “preferred alternative”) as a possible final cleanup plan. EPA will consider public opinions and information received during the comment period before making a final decision (reported in a “Record of Decision”).

EPA’s preferred alternative would:

- Remove mine waste (rock, sediment, gravel) from the surface.
- Contain the waste in two open pits at the site. This will completely fill the pits.

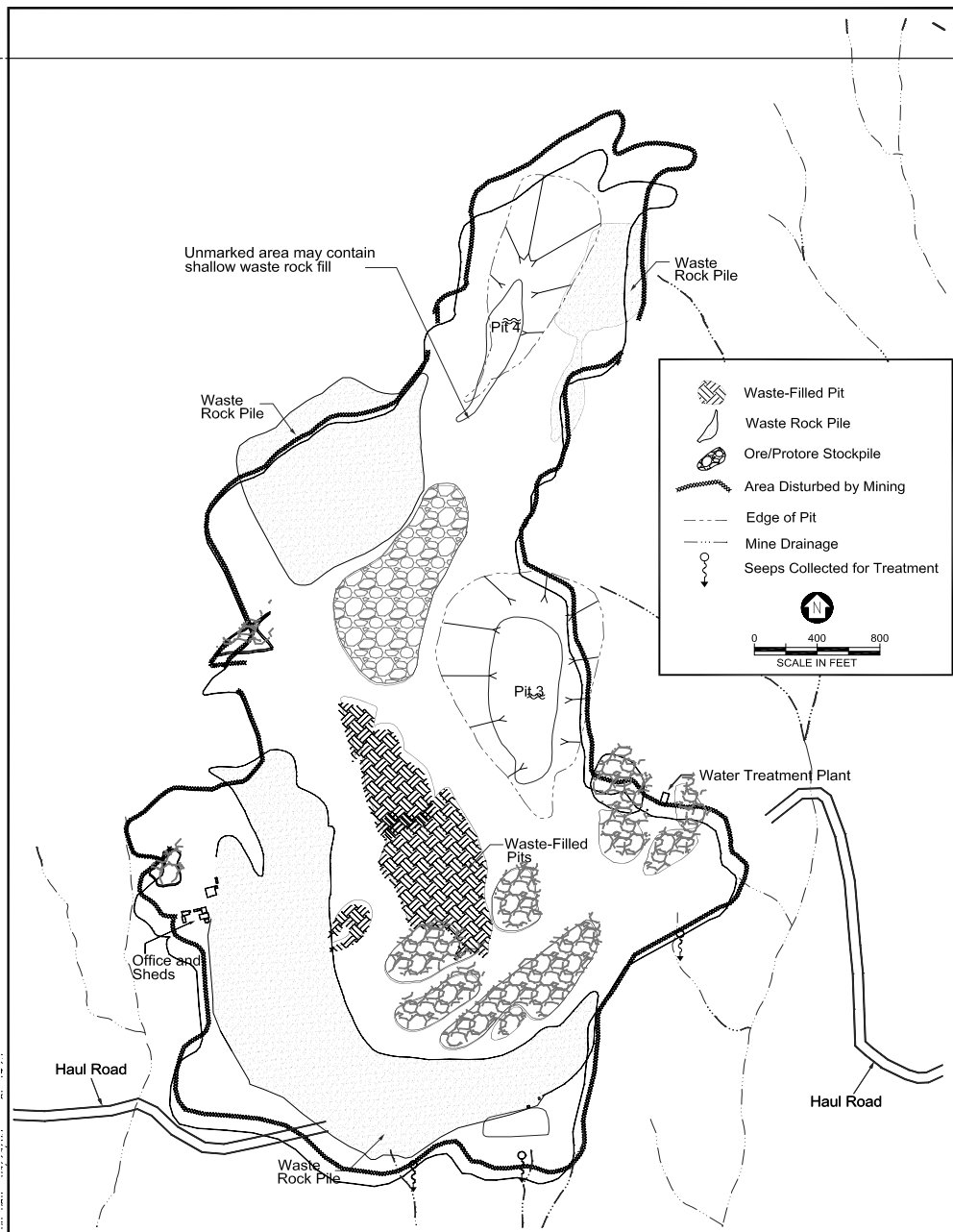
- Slope the waste in the pits and cover it with several feet of clean soil.
- Slope and cover other pits filled with waste during mining.
- Plant native plants on the soil covers and in areas cleared of waste, to prevent erosion.
- Pump groundwater entering the pits to a water treatment plant at or near the site
- Safely dispose of sludge from water treatment.
- Protect and maintain the soil covers.
- Prevent human exposure to contaminated water until cleanup levels are met.

Midnite Mine Site

EPA's preferred alternative would fill the open pits (pits 3 and 4) with waste rock.

The pits that are already filled with waste rock would be covered with clean soil.

Water from the site will be treated.



EPA's Goals for Midnite Mine

The alternatives that EPA is considering must protect human health and the environment by:

- 1) preventing contact with mine waste.
- 2) reducing the amount of radon at the ground surface.
- 3) lowering the amount of radiation at the ground surface to natural levels.
- 4) preventing continued pollution of groundwater, surface water, sediments, and air.
- 5) meeting Tribal and EPA standards for soil, sediments, surface water, and groundwater.

Why is EPA recommending this alternative?

EPA believes this alternative provides the most effective long-term solution. The preferred alternative will protect humans, animals, and plants from direct contact with mine waste and will reduce radiation and radon to meet cleanup goals.

Although it will take longer and cost more to construct this alternative than most others, over the long term the costs will be lower because less water will contact the waste and require treatment. Water treatment

will be necessary for many years at this site, so lowering the cost is important.

For all alternatives, after the waste is covered people will not be allowed to drive, drill, or build on the soil covers, or to drill wells close to the waste. Water near the site may not meet cleanup levels for many years. Under the preferred alternative, restrictions on uses apply in a smaller area and water may be usable sooner than for other alternatives.

What are the other alternatives?

The following descriptions are very short. The Proposed Plan discusses each alternative in greater detail. The first two alternatives will not be selected by EPA because they do not protect human health and the environment.

As in EPA's preferred alternative, they all include:

- sloping mine waste and covering it with clean soil
- planting to prevent erosion
- cleaning up mine roads and streambeds
- treating contaminated water
- restricting access to covered waste areas and pits
- preventing exposure to contaminated water
- reviewing how well the cleanup is working

Alternative 3: Leave Pits Open

Water that collects in the open pits would either be treated in the pits or in the water treatment plant at the site. Waste piles and waste-filled pits would be sloped and covered with soil. Contaminated groundwater would be treated underground or collected where it seeps to the surface and piped to the treatment plant.

Alternative 4: Partly Fill Open Pits with Waste

Ore would be placed in one of the open pits, and waste rock would be placed in the other. Both would be only partly filled. The rest of the waste rock would be sloped and covered with soil. Groundwater entering the pits would be treated in place with chemicals or would be pumped to the treatment plant.

Alternative 5: Completely Fill Open Pits with Waste

This is the preferred alternative described in detail on page 2.

Where do we go from here?

After EPA has received public comments, we will review them and develop a final cleanup plan called the “Record of Decision.” Following this, EPA will begin the design work. Designing the cleanup requires additional testing and may take several years. Construction activities will

start after the design is final. For the preferred alternative, construction work could take five to seven years. Throughout this process, EPA will continue to work with the community through public meetings, informal contacts and periodic updates.



United States Environmental Protection Agency

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Seattle, Washington 98101-1128

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WELLPINT, WASHINGTON
SEPTEMBER 2005*



**EPA Invites your comments on
a proposed cleanup plan**

See details inside